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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3698
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 3912
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1226
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 5064

UNCLAS AMMAN 001859

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/TIP, DRL, AND NEA/ELA
STATE PASS TO USTR (FRANCESKI, KARESH, ROSENBERG)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB PHUM QIZ JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN RESPONSE TO G/TIP REPORT: SURPRISED AT
DEMOTION, BUT HOPEFUL FOR IMPROVEMENTS

REF: A. A) STATE 55790

[B. B\) AMMAN 776](#)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Following Post delivery of Ref A points and an advance copy of the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report on Jordan to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there has been moderate press coverage and limited civil society reaction. The general feeling among media, civil society, and government contacts is that the Government of Jordan (GOJ) has made significant efforts in the past year to deal with labor issues, particularly in the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs). While few are claiming the demotion of status to Tier 2 Watchlist is undeserved, there is a sense that it will not be long before Jordan is bumped up again, a result of continued GOJ efforts to improve labor conditions. End Summary.

Government Reaction: TIP Fails to Recognize Improvements

[1](#)2. (SBU) Political Counselor delivered Ref A points to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Human Rights Directorate on June 3, but found little reaction to the Tier 2 Watchlist designation. Directorate staff thanked the Embassy for the advance copy of the TIP Report and assured PolCouns that a response was forthcoming. In contrast to the relative silence of the MFA, the press reports sounds of discontent from the Ministry of Labor (MoL). Ambassador discussed the TIP Report with Labor Minister Bassem Al-Salem during his farewell call on June 17, stressing the importance of enacting anti-trafficking legislation, prosecuting those who violate labor laws, and increasing protection for vulnerable workers. Salem commented that the report failed to accurately reflect the strides that Jordan has made, adding that a detailed, formal response was forthcoming. Despite expressing his disappointment, Salem readily agreed on these points for action, noting that comprehensive labor law reform was inscribed on the agenda for Parliament's Extraordinary Summer Session, requiring a vote before the session ended.

Mixed Media Reaction to TIP Release

[1](#)3. (U) The June 4 release of the TIP report garnered a mixed bag of media attention. The opposition daily Al-Ghad ran several stories since its release, giving the issue front-page attention along with the initial government reaction on June 6 and June 8. One article announced that Jordan is threatened with "punishments" for alleged

violations against foreign workers, and that the government "was not able to exempt Jordan" from activities related to "trafficking in persons." Another stated that Jordan had agreed under the newly established Better Work Project, which is supported by the International Labor Organization and partly financed by USAID, to allow U.S. "evaluators" to inspect the work environment within the QIZs. Al-Ghad further reported the "Labor Ministry is preparing an official reply to accusations in a new American report that considers Jordan still in violation of foreign workers' rights."

¶4. (U) Columnist Hashem Kraissat, in the June 10 edition of the independent, opposition daily Al-Arab al-Yawm, asserted that the potential for penalties brought on by the reported incidence of trafficking conditions within QIZs is further evidence that the QIZs may be more trouble than they are worth. The article noted the "receding status" of the QIZs "as well as the headache they cause dictate the need for serious treatment on all levels...The point should be that Jordan benefits from these zones not suffer from their burden."

Industry Reaction: One QIZ Praises GOJ Anti-TIP Efforts

¶5. (SBU) Garment factory manager Yanal Beasha from the Al Tajamouat QIZ near Amman had not read the TIP Report, but when PolOff informed him about the drop in status, he declared it "pretty annoying" since the GOJ has given such visible attention to labor issues in the past year. While Beasha maintained that any increased government scrutiny or auditing of the QIZs does not worry him, he noted that this

may highlight a few problems for some small subcontractors. He is confident that Jordan will not fall further to Tier 3 next year.

¶6. (SBU) United Garments factory owner and Manager Karim Saifi had also not heard of the report, but expressed some concern about the status change since previous public criticism of labor conditions in QIZs had affected his business. He noted that labor problems in Jordan have been dealt with transparently and promptly so the report may work to the industry's advantage if foreign investors see how well the GOJ and factories handle the criticisms in the report.

Civil Society Reaction: TIP Key to Raising Awareness

¶6. (SBU) UNIFEM's Human Rights and Labor Program Officer, Ghada Aku Al-Rous, believes that while Tier 2 Watchlist may seem appropriate now, time is needed to determine the full effects of current reform efforts by the MoL, as well as the level of political will needed to pass provisions for domestic workers in the draft labor law. She is very hopeful that Jordan will continue to make serious efforts to improve conditions in this sector. Rous also noted that the TIP Report is an important tool that empowers the work that UNIFEM does on trafficking by highlighting the issue. Aida Abul Ras, President of the labor rights non-governmental organization Friends of Women Workers, also maintains that the MoL has worked to sort out problems with QIZ workers. She told PolOff that today there is much more awareness about the issue of trafficking writ large as compared to years past.

¶7. (SBU) Despite previous public claims of inadequate government services and attention to migrant workers in the QIZs by President of the Textile and Garment Union, Fathalla Al-Omrani, Al-Ghad used several quotes of his, taken out of context, to defend the GOJ track record after the release of the TIP Report. According to Al-Ghad, Omrani highlighted the freedoms and services that foreign and domestic workers enjoy. Omrani later told PolOff, however, that these comments were taken out context and he maintains that there are still serious problems, as evidenced by the 46 strikes in the QIZs and 3,000 complaints the Union reportedly received from foreign workers last year.

Comment

18. (SBU) It is too early to tell whether the report's recommendations for increased prosecutions or a new trafficking law will be seen this year as a result of the TIP Report. Labor Minister Salem is focused on the importance of prosecutions, and told Ambassador he has discussed this point with the Interior Minister - and Ambassador wished so once again. Given the GOJ's transparent and open approach to such issues in the past, we do expect the GOJ to take the TIP report seriously and to continue down its current path of reform to combat trafficking in persons. Post anticipates additional public reaction to the TIP Report once the Arabic version is posted online.

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